



Skipper Mushfiqur Rahim (inset) is all smiles after guiding Abahani to a seven-wicket victory over Partex Sporting Club at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur while Mohammedan captain Shakib Al Hasan celebrates a scalp during their game against Shinepukur Cricket Club at BKSP on the opening day of the Bangabandhu Dhaka Premier Division T20 League yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED/BCB

## 'Backline has to be in top shape'

ANISUR RAHMAN



The defensive solidity of Jamie Day's boys in red and green have enjoyed a solid reputation but ironically, the British gaffer is facing a tough challenge to assemble his playing eleven, with the inexperienced backline remains his primary area of concern among all three departments, ahead of the World Cup and Asian Cup Qualifiers starting from June 3 in Qatar.

Following the absence of some key players like Bishwanath Ghosh, Yeasin Khan, Saad Uddin, Mahbubur Rahman Sufil, Nabib Newaj Jibon and Ashraf Islam Rana due to injuries or off-form, Day will be heavily relying on the superior experience of central-back Tapu Barman

international exposure but they are regular starters in their respective club sides. Also, we believe we can beat both of our opponents if we can display our peak performance in all departments on the given days. Plus having played them of late will help, where we lost narrowly 0-1 to Afghanistan and surrendered a lead to draw 1-1 against India in away matches," said Tapu.

"In my view, Tareq Raihan Kazi is now the best right back and his performance in last three league matches was really positive. Rahmat Mia is going to play at left back as usual while Riyadul Hasan Rafi and Rimon Hossain have also played really good in Nepal, so they can step up to fulfil the vacuum," said Tapu, who played only one of five World Cup Qualifying matches, against Qatar last December, upon recovering from a long



to lead the backline from the front, and inspire the whole team by extrapolation.

"I know I must take additional responsibility in the backline as the senior and experienced defender, to encourage and facilitate effective organisation and communication among defenders," Tapu told The Daily Star before leaving for Qatar last week.

The lanky defender strongly believes that the key to defeat Afghanistan and India is through compact defending, and is optimistic about the probable decisive impact of the new players.

"We are accustomed to playing a tight, defensive game and in order to win the upcoming ones, the backline has to be in top shape along with the goalkeeper, and when and if that happens, our forwards will definitely perform better," said the Bashundhara Kings defender.

"New players may not have much

knee injury.

Nevertheless, the forwards must find the target if Bangladesh is to win and Tapu Barman is willing to bank on youth upfront, in absence of experienced Jibon and Sufil.

"I really like Suman Reza's confident movements around to the opponent box, and his speed with the ball and shooting are commendable. So I believe Suman, being the highest scorer among locals, can be decisive even with a limited international experience," Tapu added further.

"If you look at the wing, there are Matin Mia and Rakib Hossain, who I think is the best performer among local wingers in the league. Rakib also scored six goals, which shows that the strikers and wingers have been in goal-scoring form and now if they can carry their momentum into the matches ahead, we can produce the results in our favour," Tapu concluded.

SPORTS REPORTER



On a rain-marred opening day yesterday, it was Mushfiqur Rahim, Tamim Iqbal, Shakib Al Hasan -- three common heroes of Bangladesh national side -- who took charge for their respective teams in the Bangabandhu Dhaka Premier Division T20 League, an alternate to the suspended edition of the prestigious 50-over competition.

In a rain-curtailed game at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, an unbeaten 26-ball 38 from skipper Mushfiqur helped Abahani romp to a seven-wicket victory against Partex Sporting Club. Despite skipper Tasamul Haque's unbeaten 65, Partex could only manage 120 for five as Abahani bowlers Mohammad Saifuddin, Taijul Islam and Arafat Sunny kept the scoring rate in check.

However, rain brought the target down to 70 from 10 overs and Mushfiqur's unbeaten knock steered the Sky Blues to victory with four balls to spare.

At BKSP-3, Bangladesh's ODI skipper Tamim smashed a 22-ball 46 to help his side, Prime Bank Cricket Club, seal a seven-wicket win against Gazi Group. In a game that was reduced to 12-overs-a-side, Tamim, who is often criticised for his slow approach, smashed five sixes and two fours to help his side chase down 92 runs with 16 balls to spare.

Meanwhile at BKSP-4, Shakib Al Hasan produced an all-round performance to guide Mohammedan Sporting Club to a three-wicket victory against Shinepukur Cricket Club.

Shakib, who has been struggling for form lately, bagged two wickets for 29 runs in four overs to help restrict Shinepukur to 125 for six. Parvez Hossain Emon's blazing 39 at the top and Shakib's handy 22-ball 29 in the middle had Mohammedan on course for a comfortable victory.

However, loss of four wickets in space of 11 deliveries at the latter stage of the innings cast some doubt over Mohammedan's run chase but Abu Hider Rony's smashing six off Mrittunjoy Chowdhury in the penultimate delivery sealed the fate of an

### RESULTS

Abahani (72-3 in 9.2 overs) beat Partex Sporting Club (120-5 in 20 overs) by seven wickets (D/L method)  
Old DOHS Sports Club (171-4 in 20 overs) v Legends of Rugganj [Match abandoned]  
Brothers Union (127-7 in 18.4 overs) v Doleshwar [Match abandoned]  
Sheikh Jamal (166-6 in 20 overs) beat Khelaghar (144-8 in 20 overs) by 22 runs.  
Prime Bank (92-3 in 9.2 overs) beat Gazi Group (91-5 in 12 overs) by seven wickets.  
Mohammedan (129-7 in 19.5 overs) beat Shinepukur (12-6 in 20 overs) by three wickets.

enthralling contest.

Meanwhile, in the afternoon game in Mirpur, Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club defeated Khelaghar Samaj Kalyan Samity by 22 runs while the other two matches of the day -- between Old DOHS Sports Club and Legends of Rugganj at BKSP 3 and the

one between Brothers Union and Prime Doleshwar at BKSP 4 -- were abandoned after just one innings due to rain.

This edition of DPL remains unique due to a change in format and due to the fact that all the premier stars of the national side are participating in a domestic competition for the first time in many years. And that also makes this T20 league a remarkable opportunity for youngsters and the ones who have been struggling to cement their place in the national side despite playing international cricket for five to six years to emerge out of the shadows of the seniors.

But as far as the opening day results are concerned, that was not the case. Najmul Hossain Shanto, who has been fighting for his reinstatement in the Tigers' shorter-format squads, made just two for Abahani while another national team struggler, Soumya Sarkar, failed to make an impact for Gazi Group.

Even though there is still a long way to go before the tournament ends, it may be time for youngsters and national team strugglers to start stepping up.

## Zidane reveals reason behind Real exit

AFP, MADRID

Zinedine Zidane resigned as Real Madrid manager because he felt the Spanish club no longer had any confidence in him, he wrote in an open letter on Monday.

"I'm leaving because I feel the club no longer has the faith in me I need, and doesn't offer me the support to build something in the medium or long term," the Frenchman wrote in the letter published in the sports daily AS.

"I am a born winner and I was here to win trophies, but beyond this there are human beings, emotions, life and I have the feeling that these things have not been valued, that it has not been understood that this is also how the dynamic of a great club is maintained," he said.

"But everything I built on a daily basis, what I brought to the relationship with the players... has been forgotten. "I'm leaving, but I'm not jumping ship and I'm not tired of coaching," he said.

Real had a disappointing season, finishing second in La Liga behind neighbours Atletico Madrid and losing to eventual winners Chelsea in the Champions League semi-finals.

It was the first time that the 13-time European champions had failed to win a trophy in 11 seasons. It is the second time that Zidane has resigned as Real Madrid manager.



New Zealand pace sensation Kyle Jamieson bowls during a practice session yesterday ahead of the first Test against England, starting from tomorrow at Lord's. For New Zealand, it looks like the ideal preparation for the World Test Championship final against India this month. The Kiwis will look to make the most of these two games to acclimatise to the conditions and get their team combination right.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## 'Mbappe is still a young player, a phenomenon'

AGENCIES

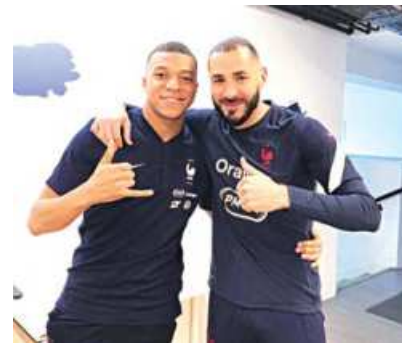


Five years after an exile from the France national team, Karim Benzema said he is looking to put the past behind him and his only focus is on leading the line for Didier Deschamps' side at next month's European Championship.

Benzema will team up with 22-year-old Kylian Mbappe who led France to the World Cup title in 2018 and the striker praised his younger team mate.

"I do not like to compare, (Mbappe) is still a young player, a phenomenon," Benzema said. "I have already been able to train with him. We play with one touch, he has good movement, he has a lot of speed and has skill in front of goal. He's a very, very good player."

Benzema, who has scored 30 goals in all competitions for Real Madrid this season, has not played for France since 2015 after a blackmailing



scandal over which he faces a trial in October.

The 33-year-old also said in 2016 that Deschamps had "bowed to the pressure of a racist part of France" when leaving the forward out of the Euro squad that year but got a surprise call-up for the Euros which begin on June 11.

"What happened has happened. There are always regrets, we cannot turn back, we can just change from the past," Benzema, who has 27 goals

in 81 games for France, told reporters on Sunday.

"The most important thing is what happens on the ground... Now I'm focused on the game and trying to show the best on the pitch."

The France boss declined to elaborate on how the situation between himself and the Real Madrid star has changed in the five-and-a-half years since his last call-up.

"I'm not going to give you or anyone else any more details about that," Deschamps said in an interview with France Info. "You know the story of our meeting, the most important step: we met and talked. Without that, it would have been impossible."

"To talk about forgiveness is a big word. We are not talking about Didier Deschamps as a man, but Didier Deschamps as a coach," he explained.

"And I am in a position [as coach]. As I said before, I'll say it again, even if it's hard for some people to understand: I'm not interested in my personal situation."

## 'I'm feeling old at 20'

REUTERS



Birthday girl Iga Swiatek faced some stiff resistance in the second set before the Pole went on to beat best friend Kaja Juvan of Slovenia 6-0, 7-5 to launch her French Open title defence on Monday.

Celebrating her 20th birthday, Swiatek got a warm hug before the start of the match from Juvan, who is her friend from junior ranks, but the Pole did not return any favours once they got on the opposite sides of the net at Court Philippe-Chatrier. "It's never easy to play against



your best friend," Swiatek told reporters. "You just try to block this friendship for two hours, just focus on the game. I think I'm doing that

pretty well. It's nice to have that skill.

"So I was just trying to treat Kaja as any other girl, as any other opponent, because in sports when we are on court you can't have, like, thoughts that are going to make your game more soft."

The friends shared another warm embrace at the net followed by a lengthy discussion and Juvan stayed back on court as Swiatek was handed a bouquet and the spectators sang 'happy birthday' for her.

"I'm feeling old at 20," Swiatek wrote on the lens of the camera before walking off the court having set a second-round meeting against Sweden's Rebecca Peterson.

Argentina and Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi takes part in a training session at the Ezeiza Campus in Buenos Aires ahead of his country's World Cup qualifiers match against Chile on Friday and Copa America. Meanwhile, the South American Football Confederation (CONMEBOL) said on Sunday that Argentina would no longer host the Copa America, throwing the troubled tournament into doubt just 13 days before it was due to kick off.

PHOTO: TWITTER

